

Sciences Institute (EOHSI) in Piscataway, New Jersey, to share ideas about how changes in the environment relate to risk and how to improve the effectiveness of science-based communications with the public. The symposium, entitled *Communicating Risk in a Changing World*, was sponsored by the Subcommittee on Risk Communication and Education (a division of the U.S. Public Health Service's Environmental Health Policy Committee), along with the U.S. Department of Energy and the Consortium for Risk Evaluation with Stakeholder Participation. Recommendations from the meeting will be used by the subcommittee to develop guidelines on contemporary risk communication issues for use by federal agencies.

The symposium began with a briefing on the May 1996 report of a federal risk commission, which recommended that the public be more involved in risk assessment processes. "The government has been focusing on risks, options, and decisions," said Bernard Goldstein, director of the EOHSI and a member of the commission. "We've ignored that all [decision making] should be done with the stakeholders."

Symposium attendees examined six areas including environmental justice, comparative risk assessment, broadening stakeholder involvement, the role of the media, educational strategies, and community and worker right-to-know issues. For each area, they attempted to identify changing forces and trends, determine how these changes affect risk communication processes, and formulate future responses to these changes. According to Barry Johnson, assistant administrator of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, the participants addressed the six areas in a "comprehensive, exciting, and thorough" manner.

In the area of environmental justice, the participants determined that fairness, rather than risk, is the main issue and that, although community members are not currently included in evaluation efforts, they should be. In order to involve neighborhoods in the risk assessment process, leaders should recognize that responsiveness and the building of trust are essential.

Comparative risk assessment was loosely defined at the meeting as a methodology to identify and rank issues. Participants determined that, in developing comparative risk assessment, scientists need to include outside viewpoints and to make the process more easily understandable to the public.

Stakeholder participation was a major topic of discussion, with the consensus being that more attention should be focused on defining exactly who stakeholders are in

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### Silicon Lungs

Two organizations that critique sites on the World Wide Web recently lauded the American Thoracic Society (ATS) for its dissemination of free, useful information over the Internet. Located at <http://www.thoracic.org/>, the ATS site provides updates on advances in respiratory and critical care medicine and on the legislation that affects health care in the United States. It is also a good source of information on training, research, and conferences sponsored by the society.

Founded in 1905 as an organization committed to the eradication of tuberculosis, the ATS now serves as the medical branch of the American Lung Association and has over 12,500 members. The breadth of the society's research activities has expanded, with members investigating respiratory ailments such as pneumonia and occupational lung disease as well as methods to improve the critical care received by hospitalized patients. Two journals published by the society reflect these activities, and the contents and abstracts from each can be accessed via the ATS Web site.

The ATS Publications link on the society's homepage connects users to the homepages for the *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine* and the *American Journal of Respiratory Cell and Molecular Biology*. Through the

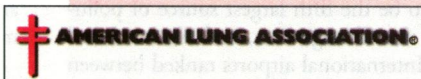
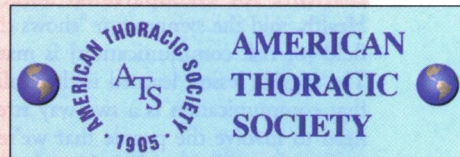
Contact Information link on this page, users can access subscription and submission information for each journal. There are also links that connect users to the tables of contents for the current issues of the journals. Abstracts from papers in the four most recent issues of each journal can be accessed through the Abstracts link on the ATS Publications page.

Through the ATS Publications page, users can access ATS position papers on a range of topics including pulmonary function testing, pulmonary infection, respiratory disease, and environmental and occupational health. Other resources accessible from the ATS Publications menu include a list of CD-ROM publications that can be ordered from ATS and the on-line edition of the *ATS News*, which announces awards, conferences, and courses relating to the society's work.

The Washington Reports link on the ATS homepage connects to a resource that allows scientists and health professionals to keep abreast of the legislative decisions that affect their work. The Legislative Update link provides information on the latest public policy issues, while a separate link connects to a 12-month legislative archive.

For those who are members or who are interested in joining the ATS, membership information is available through the society's homepage, including a map to make finding the nearest ATS chapter easier, membership statistics, and an e-mail link for the organization. The Assemblies link on the homepage connects users to information on the structure of the ATS and the necessary guidelines and forms for requesting ATS research funding. Information on the society's major conference, the Second ATS State-of-the-Art Review Course in Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, is also linked to the homepage.

Other information available on the ATS site can be located by using the internal search engine accessible through an icon at the bottom of the homepage. The homepage of the society's sister organization, the American Lung Association, is accessible by following either the General Public Information link or the Research link.



order to facilitate their involvement in risk decisions. The group suggested that identifying and addressing peer group leaders is the best way to communicate with public groups and communities.

In discussing the role of the media, participants pointed out the need for better communication between scientists and members of the media, and suggested that risk issues could be linked to social, economic, and political issues to illustrate risk's relevance to the public. However, they warned that repeatedly presenting the public with

extensive information on risk could result in a sort of information burnout.

Cooperation and trust are the keys to handling right-to-know issues with workers and communities, the group stated, particularly in the areas of training and educating both workers and the community. In addition, participants said, it is important to assess the needs of a community and determine who is being educated and how. The group also suggested that, once a community has been educated on risk issues, it is important to provide risk updates in order to